

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0023 - FAVORABLE
School Discipline - Data Collection and School Resource Officers

TO: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair
Washington, and members of the Ways and
Means Committee

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Jan 20, 2022

I am Chris Apple, I live in Columbia in District 13. This testimony is in support of Bill HB0023.

My mother was a career educator, and she always worked hard to deeply understand the needs of each student. Although at times a student may act out, disciplinary actions should be considered carefully, and applied with the aim of teaching the student. Ideally, disciplinary actions should prepare them to face challenges in life that they might be struggling with in school. Sometimes disciplinary action is not always effective at meeting an individual student's long-term needs. IEP's can vary greatly and some students may be better helped by other courses of action.

That is why parents and guardians need a full and complete accounting of any actions taken against their students. Maryland has many dedicated, passionate teachers and support staff, but students are not always treated fairly or equally. Sometimes schools cannot give parents a full accounting of disciplinary actions, leaving them responsible for investigating on their own. I have even known parents who investigated a disciplinary action only to find it had violated the student's IEP - an IEP that the school explicitly agreed to follow.

In Maryland, school discipline also disproportionately affects children with disabilities and minorities. Disciplinary action can have grave and lasting effects on a student well into adulthood. African American students have disproportionately high incidents of arrest and are especially at risk. A Maryland commission on the school-to-prison pipeline found that African American students did *not* exhibit especially bad or unruly conduct. Rather, these students were arrested because of bias from school administrators, and unequal application of school rules and policies¹. A criminal record can constrain a student's opportunities for the rest of their life. Arrests should only be pursued if it is absolutely crucial, and only with a high level of transparency.

This bill will provide additional data and incentive for schools to address the disparity in disciplinary actions. I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for HB0023.

¹ 1 Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, Final Report and Collaborative Action Plan, 29. <http://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/AAEEBB/CommissionSchoolPrisonPipeline.pdf>